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Boston Redevelopment Authority

WATERFRONT PARK DEDICATION FACT SHEET

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NEWS RELEASE

Boston Redevelopment Authority
Robert T. Kenney, Director

CONTACT: Ralph Memolo

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WATERFRONT PARK DEDICATION
FACT SHEET

May 9, 1976

SIZE: 4.5 acres

COST: $2.5 million (half a grant from the Department of Interior's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and half the city's share of waterfront renewal costs)

LOCATION: Area between Long Wharf and Commercial Wharf on land which became available when Atlantic Avenue was realigned away from water's edge and curved towards Central Artery

DESIGNER: Sasaki and Associates (Watertown, MA) in conjunction with the BRA Urban Design Department

CONTRACTOR: J. F. White Construction Company

DESIGN FEATURES:

-Park is built on a slope away from Atlantic Avenue towards the water to allow greater visibility of the harbor.

-An arch-shaped wooden trellis, 340 feet long, runs almost the entire length of the park. The trellis will be covered with roses and wisteria.

-All building materials and plant materials reflect nautical flavor of the waterfront area.

-Building materials consist of brick, granite, and cobblestone.

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-Plants include 180 trees and 883 shrubs.

-There are two fountains in the park. One is an ornamental fountain and is located in a wooded grove. The other is a spray fountain-wading pool and is part of the children's play area.

-Bollards, linked with anchor chain, run along the sea wall at the edge of the park.

-Black lighting fixtures are of a nautical design, resembling a ship's lantern.

-Additional lighting is provided by a "necklace" of lighting fixtures that are incorporated into the wooden trellis.

-There are 98 benches with backs and 38 backless benches.

-A children's play area will consist of the fountain, a sand pit and timber forms, all of which reflect the nautical flavor of the park.

-Four triangular-shaped informational pylons, eight feet high, will contain graphics and text which relate the history of the waterfront from Colonial days to the present era of renewal.

-The park also contains a fenced-off dog station, with three brightly-painted hydrants.

-Park is the terminus of the Walkway to the Sea, a pedestrian pathway which runs from City Hall Plaza through the Faneuil Hall Markets area, under the Central Artery to the Park.

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WATERFRONT RENEWAL PROJECT: The Waterfront Park is part of the Boston Redevelopment Authority's Downtown-Waterfront Urban Renewal Project. Since the start of the project in 1964, the BRA has spent a total of $52 million in Federal and city funds on acquisition of land and property, demolition, relocation and installation of an entirely new public utility system in the 102 acres covered by the project. Since that time, over $60 million in private investment has taken place in the project area and almost one-third of that total has been expended on rehabilitation of buildings for housing and commercial use. During the period of renewal, 1230 units of new housing (including rehabilitated units) have been built or under construction. The population of the waterfront area was 943, according to the 1970 U. S. Census. Last fall, the state census reported that the population of the waterfront is approximately 3400 people.

FRANK S. CHRISTIAN -- "MR. WATERFRONT"

Frank S. Christian was a Boston businessman who is generally credited with initiating the planning effort that led to renewal of the downtown waterfront.

Mr. Christian, who died in December, 1970, was a senior vice president of New England Merchant's National Bank and past president of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

In 1959, Mr. Christian urged the Chamber to form a committee to study the feasibility of redeveloping the waterfront area. Two years later the BRA requested that Mr. Christian sponsor a study which would look into the possibility of saving the waterfront. Mr. Christian raised $200,000 in private funds to finance the study and enlisted many of Boston's leading businessmen to support the proposed redevelopment plan. That study, conducted by the non-profit Downtown Waterfront Corporation, provided the basis for the BRA's Downtown Waterfront Renewal Plan.

The BRA's plan was approved by the City Council in 1964 and Mr. Christian is given major credit for helping the BRA to obtain this approval.

Mr. Christian also played a major role in convincing then Governor John Volpe to relocate Central Artery ramps which facilitated renewal of the waterfront.

He also helped secure financing from the business community to help in construction of the food and produce wholesale market in Everett so that produce dealers could be relocated to the new, more efficient facility. That, in turn, made it possible for the BRA to carry out restoration of the Faneuil Hall Markets, which is now underway.

Mr. Christian also persuaded the New England Aquarium to locate its new facility on Central Wharf.

BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

ROBERT T. KENNEY
DIRECTOR

MAY 9, 1976

STATEMENT

I don't think there is much need for me to dwell on this park and what it means to the city. All of you who are present can see just how this park has transformed the waterfront.

But I do think this is an occasion when we should talk briefly about what was here before.

A visitor to Boston in the 1950's would probably find it hard to believe that Boston had a waterfront which was once the center of shipping in America. The brick and granite wharf buildings, which once bustled with trade, had fallen into disuse and other decrepit sheds and warehouses (not to mention a railroad which ran down Atlantic Avenue) created a formidable barrier between the city and its historic waterfront district. Even a resident of the city would require a special kind of vision to imagine the waterfront as an asset. It was said of Boston at the time that the whole city seemed like it was ready to fall into the harbor and no part of downtown appeared more destined for this fate than the waterfront itself.

Fortunately for Boston there were some men who were able to look at the waterfront and see what it could (and should) be, rather than what it was. They knew that the downtown

waterfront would never again be the center of shipping in America, but they also knew that Boston was wasting one of its great amenities, its harbor, because people were prevented access, either on foot, or in a visual sense, from the water's edge. They were convinced that the waterfront could become a residential community, that it could once again become a center of commerce, a prime location for shops and restaurants, for hotels and for offices. They knew that the waterfront could become a regional recreation center, once parks and open space supplanted the rundown sheds and deteriorating buildings.

It is difficult to single out one individual as the moving force behind a plan that has spanned three city administrations and almost two generations of downtown business leadership. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the late Frank S. Christian, a former president of the Chamber of Commerce and a senior vice president of the New England Merchants National Bank, is the one Bostonian who spearheaded the effort to reclaim the downtown waterfront.

Mr. Christian's initial involvement with the waterfront began in 1959, when he urged the Chamber to form a committee to study the feasibility of redeveloping the waterfront area. He raised $200,000 in private funds to sponsor the study and succeeded in recruiting additional business support for the waterfront project. As head of the non-profit Downtown Waterfront

Corporation, Mr. Christian was instrumental in the BRA's formulation of a Waterfront Urban Renewal Project, and provided invaluable assistance to the BRA in gaining City Council approval of that plan.

Mr. Christian also played a major role in persuading then Governor Volpe to relocate certain Central Artery ramps which helped facilitate renewal along the waterfront. In addition, he helped secure the private financing needed to build new warehouse facilities in Everett for food and produce wholesalers who wanted to be relocated from the waterfront, and he convinced the New England Aquarium Corporation to locate their new Aquarium on Central Wharf.

To commemorate Mr. Christian's tireless efforts on behalf of waterfront renewal, the BRA is dedicating the new Waterfront Park on Atlantic Avenue to his memory.

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NEWS RELEASE

Boston Redevelopment Authority
Robert T. Kenney, Director

CONTACT: Ralph Memolo

May 9, 1976

Mayor Kevin H. White today joined officials of the Boston Redevelopment Authority and residents of the North End and Waterfront communities in dedication ceremonies for Boston's new waterfront park.

The park, located on 4.5 acres of land between Long Wharf and Commercial Wharf, was constructed by the Boston Redevelopment Authority as part of the Downtown-Waterfront Renewal Project.

A feature of the dedication ceremonies was the unveiling of a granite plaque which commemorates the contribution of the late Frank S. Christian towards revitalization of the Boston waterfront. Christian, a Boston businessman who served as president of the Chamber of Commerce, played a leading role in planning the waterfront renewal project. His widow, Martha, and a son, Michael, were present for the unveiling of the plaque.

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Mayor White said, "This park ranks with the Public Garden and the Common as an urban amenity. But the park is also important in a symbolic sense. Boston had once turned its back on the waterfront. This park re-establishes Boston's historic connection with the sea. For the first time in almost a century people now have visual and physical access to the harbor. What was once an area of decaying wooden sheds and warehouse buildings has become one of the great public places in this city.

"Those members of the Boston business community, and in particular Frank Christian, deserve the gratitude of all Bostonians for having had the foresight and imagination to propose redevelopment of this area. This city is a better place because of Frank Christian and those who lent their support to this project."

The Mayor also participated in a ceremony marking the opening of a walkway around the New England Aquarium, which is located on Central Wharf, near the Waterfront Park. The walkway is one element in a long-range BRA proposal to build a pedestrian pathway which will allow public access along the water's edge from the South Station area to the North End.

Both events were timed to coincide with the opening of National Historic Preservation Week in Boston.

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BRA Director Robert T. Kenney said, "It is only fitting and proper that we open these two facilities as part of National Historic Preservation Week. For what we have done on the waterfront over the past decade is preservation in the best sense of the word. The entire renewal effort--and the millions of dollars we have spent here--has had as its aim the restoration of the waterfront and to bring new uses to this area. With the completion of the park, we have reached a milestone in this ambitious undertaking."

Kenney said that the population of the waterfront has increased by 2500 in the past five years and that over 1200 new units of housing have been built, or are under construction. He noted that of the $60 million in private investment that has taken place in the waterfront, approximately one-third of that amount has gone to rehabilitation of buildings in the area.

The park itself was built at a cost of $2.5 million. Almost one half of this amount was provided by a grant from Department of Interior's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. The remainder was provided by the City of Boston as its share of the waterfront renewal project. Thus far, over $32 million in Federal funds have been spent on the renewal project and about $20 million in city money.

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Kenney noted that the original urban renewal plan called for a park which would be two acres in size. However, the BRA, working with citizen groups from the North End and Waterfront, modified the plan so that the size of the park has been doubled.

In order to expand the park, Atlantic Avenue, which once ran along the water's edge, has been narrowed and realigned so that it curves away from the water towards the Central Artery and then returns to its old alignment at Commercial Street.

The park, designed by Sasaki and Associates, in conjunction with the BRA Urban Design Department, has been described as an "Arboretum on the sea."

The dominating feature of the park is an arch-shaped trellis of natural wood which runs 340 feet, almost the entire length of the park. The trellis will be covered with climbing roses and wisteria.

All plant materials--which include 180 trees and 883 shrubs--are indigenous to the waterfront location.

The seaport flavor of the park is further enhanced by the use of materials such as cobblestone, brick and granite. (The cobblestones were salvaged from streets in the area when they were torn up to allow for construction of the park.) In addition, the nautical flavor of the park is reflected in the lighting fixtures, which resemble a ship's lantern, and the cast-iron bollards, linked by anchor chains, which run along the sea wall of the park. Approximately, one acre of the park is covered with grass.

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Additional lighting will be provided with lights which are incorporated into the wooden trellis.

Aside from the seating area provided by the steps and grassy slope, the park will contain 98 benches with backs and 38 backless benches.

The park has been designed so that it slopes towards the water and thereby provides greater visibility of the harbor. This sloped effect also provides a screen from the noise of traffic passing on Atlantic Avenue and the Central Artery.

There will be two fountains in the park, one an ornamental fountain which will be located in a grove of trees and the other a spray fountain which is part of a children's play area.

The children's play area will also consist of a tot-lot that will have a sand pit and a timber-form ship.

The park, particularly its southern portion, is the terminus of the Walkway to the Sea, a pedestrian path that begins in the Government Center and continues through the Faneuil Hall Markets area, under the artery and into the park.

Other features of the park include four triangular-shaped information pylons that are eight feet high and contain text and graphics which relate the history of the waterfront from

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colonial days through the era of redevelopment that has occurred over the past decade.

The park also contains a dog station. The dog station is a fenced off area which contains three brightly-colored fire hydrants.

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